

Salvation calls us to act

Sunday after the Epiphany

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The first Sunday after the Epiphany draws upon the account of the Baptism of our Lord. It is significant that this is seen as the starting point for the teaching of the year. We remember his birth and then as we begin to explore the ministry of Jesus, we come to his starting point. Entering the water at the hands of John. John quite rightly identifies that he was the one in fact the only one who did not need to be baptised for the forgiveness of sin in fact that he should be the baptiser. Here as he enters the water, he completes the essence of the incarnation. Veiled in flesh, he now identifies with more than our humanity, he identifies with our sinfulness.

Jesus is saying to us, I identify with you. I will meet you here in your sinfulness with the express aim of being able to lift you out of the mire and take you up into heavenly places. It is here in this passage, that we have the essence of salvation for here the voice of the father and the Spirit/dove now confirm that here is his son – the one who pleases him by doing his will. The plan of the father is now coming to fruition through the undertakings of the Son. It is not some random even in the universe, but the plan the salvation plan of God in heaven. The death introduced by Adam is overwhelmed by the Son and that each and everyone of us might be saved is the end result the perfection of our humanity.

So how do you feel? This may be a fact that you have held dearly all these years on your faith journey, and yet is it impacting on your life as you live it? C T Studd, the founder of Worldwide evangelism Crusade, later known as WEC International put it in this way.

If Jesus Christ is God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.

Over a hundred and twenty years ago, in February 1885, a group of young men set sail from England to become missionaries in China. They included graduates and ex-army officers and were known as the "Cambridge Seven" because they had felt called to the mission field after attending meetings at that University. The leading member of the group was Charles T. Studd, the son of a wealthy indigo- planter who had retired from India to a large country house at Tidworth in Wiltshire. His father had been converted in 1877 when a friend took him to hear D. L. Moody preaching in London and he immediately gave up his pastimes of racing and hunting and used his home for evangelistic meetings until his death two years later.

Charles and two of his brothers, Kynaston and George, were all at Eton when their father was converted, and they were far from pleased by his efforts to interest them in the gospel. However, unknown to each other, all three were also converted when a visiting preacher went to stay with the Studd family during the summer holidays of 1878. The three brothers excelled at cricket both at Eton and later at Cambridge where they achieved a remarkable record of each captaining the cricket team in successive seasons from 1882 to 1884. The exceptional skills shown by Charles gained him a place in the England team in 1882 which lost the match to Australia which originated the tradition of the "Ashes" between the two countries. The following winter he toured Australia with the England team that recovered the trophy but in 1884 his brother George was taken seriously ill and Charles was confronted by the question, "What is all the fame and flattery worth when a man comes to face eternity?" He had to admit that since his conversion six years earlier he had been in "an unhappy backslidden state." As a result of the experience he stated, "I know that cricket

would not last, and honour would not last, and nothing in this world would last, but it was worthwhile living for the world to come."

After hearing a missionary speaking about the need for workers in China. Charles was increasingly burdened and convicted by verses such as "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." (Psalm 2:8). Although his friends and relatives tried to dissuade him, Charles knew he was being called to the mission field and he sought an interview with Hudson Taylor, the director of the China Inland Mission and was accepted as an associate member.

Studd's decision was followed by six others within a few weeks and as they prepared for the mission field, members of the "Cambridge Seven" spoke at meetings up and down the country with remarkable results. In addition to numerous conversions, a great wave of missionary zeal swept through the students of Edinburgh, London, Oxford and Cambridge which was to have profound effects throughout the world in later years.

For C. T Studd those future years were to see him giving away his family inheritance to help the work of George Muller, D. L. Moody, Dr. Barnardo and others and spending ten years in China where he suffered great hardships to reach remote areas where the gospel had never been heard before. On returning to England he was invited to visit America where his brother Kynaston had recently arranged meetings that had led to the formation of the Student Volunteer movement. During this tour, he experienced a powerful blessing upon his ministry and the spiritual life in many colleges, churches and other bodies was radically transformed.

From 1900-1906 Studd was pastor of a church at Ootacamund in South India and although it was a different situation to the pioneer missionary work in China, his ministry was marked by numerous conversions amongst the British officials and the local community. However, on his return home Studd became concerned about the large parts of Africa that had never been reached with the Gospel and in 1910 he went to the Sudan and was convicted by the lack of Christian witness in central Africa. Out of this concern Studd was led to set up the Heart of Africa Mission .

On his first venture into the Belgian Congo in 1913, Studd established four mission stations in an area inhabited by eight different tribes. Then a serious illness to his wife required his return to England, but when he returned to the Congo in 1916 she had recovered sufficiently to undertake the expansion of the mission into the World Evangelism Crusade with workers in South America, central Asia and the middle East as well as Africa. Supported by his wife's work of home, Studd built up an extensive missionary outreach based on his centre at Ibambi and although she made a short visit to the Congo in 1928 that was the only time they met again since she died in the following year. Two years later, still labouring for the Lord at Ibambi at the age of seventy, Charles Studd died, but his vision for China, India and Africa had expanded to reach the whole unevangelized world. He went to Africa when everyone was saying he was too old and has been the pioneer and inspiration of many great works for God. He lived by the motto: *Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.*

Faith is not a sense of piety that curls up safely in the pew but demands the bold striding out in the name of Jesus. That Jesus would identify with us is our calling to identify with him. CT Studd should not be seen as abnormal for our faith calls us to get on and act in His name. Faith seeks to complete the plan of God.

We are called to be God's agents here on the Yorke Peninsula and as such, we should ask ourselves 'Where is God calling me to act?' 'What should I be doing?' Let us react to this message of Salvation, this message of hope, challenging the world for Jesus and completing his mission. **This is the meaning of our Baptism.**

AMEN

